
REACHING OUT

VOLUME 18, NUMBER 1

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World Service Office, PO Box 9999, Van Nuys, CA 91409-9099

Welcome

We would like to welcome all of you to the NA World Services H&I Newsletter. We hope that the contents of this newsletter will assist you in your recovery or H&I efforts in the Fellowship of Narcotics Anonymous.

FROM THE INSIDE

Dear *Reaching Out*,

Hi! My name is C and I am an addict. I believe I have been all of my life. I am locked up in a juvenile correctional facility. I'm 18 years old, and I'm about to be released in 3½ months.*

I have lost everything that ever meant anything to me because of drugs and my inability to stop using them. My family hates me, and I really don't blame them either. After all, I am the one who was always using, not them I didn't have any regard for how they felt.

I have found NA through counselors here. I have just started my Fourth Step. There aren't any meetings here anymore. NA just stopped coming, so I try to read as much NA literature as I possibly can. That's how I found out about *Reaching Out*. That's my meeting now. I thank God for bringing it to me.

* Letter received February 2001

When I am released, I am going to a meeting the day I get out. I have found out that the NA program works. I have been in and out of institutions since I was 14. Two of them offered NA, and I went, but not for the right reasons. I just wanted to get released, and I thought it would look good.

Thanks to God and the NA Fellowship, I am learning a new way to live. I thank God every day for bringing me here, or else I would be dead or dying. Instead, I am learning that I can make it out there, just for today. Thank you and God bless.

CS, Florida

Dear *Reaching Out*,

I feel that it's my duty as a recovering addict to write something about my track record and how this program has changed all of that.

I believe that the things I went through in life might help others out there or in here. I first got high at 13 when my sister turned me on. Although in the beginning it was only a once-in-a-while thing, it soon progressed. It progressed over the years until now, at the age of 42, I am serving a six-year sentence for a crime that I committed as a direct result of this terrible disease we have.

After being detoxed about eight or nine times prior to the time I am doing now, I realized that I needed to change something in my life. So, through my Higher Power, I can say that doing drugs isn't the cool thing that I thought it was.

As long as I tell myself that just for today I don't have to use, that I can live life one day at a time and use the steps of NA, I am able to stay clean.

Going to meetings and staying involved is what it takes to be a successful recovering addict. I am living proof that NA works. I will continue my lifelong journey of being a recovering addict. There's nothing wrong with being an addict as long as you are a clean and recovering one.

I am truly fortunate and blessed, because now that I am in recovery my wife has decided to wait for me until I get out.

CC, Virginia

Dear *Reaching Out*,

Thank God for NA. NA has given me a new perspective on my life. I'm sure my story has similarities to others, but I'll give you a little background anyway.

I came from an upper-middle-class family in Illinois. No family abuse, no breakups, with opportunities for everything good in life. I went to specialized schools for gifted children and graduated high school at 15½. For so many years, my efforts had been concentrated on my academics. My only social activities were Boy Scouts, bowling league, little league baseball, football, etc., etc. However, I did get into college and fell into the normal social use of various drugs, which all but took my focus off school, and I eventually lost interest in my studies.

After attempting to pursue my musical interests I ended up cutting my hair and moved back in with my parents. I also got a regular job at a bank.

My life went through many ups and downs. I had many successes in business, had two marriages that fell apart when financial disaster hit, and raised my two beautiful, talented daughters, basically as a single parent.

Now it was finally time for me to enjoy my life, for me. I got back into music, but with my daughters grown and away from home I felt I needed a meaningful relationship. However, with the type of job I had, the drug culture was beginning to surround my life, although I wasn't using yet.

I got hooked up with a bunch of different women, all of whom had a lot of emotional secrets. All of them used in one form or another. I still wasn't using anything yet.

Once I took that first one, however, it was on, and I used substances and did some things that I said I would never do, and no matter how hard I tried, I seemed to keep entangling myself in codependent relationships.

It got so bad that I ended up driving a cab in Florida. It was in this job that I met a lot of dealers, drug addicts, and prostitutes. I eventually fell into the cycle of addiction again.

Just like it says in our Basic Text when it talks about the end results of active addiction, I was arrested. After waiting for four months, I was sentenced to three months in a jail drug program with two years' probation. The authorities accidentally released me without

my going to the drug program. After being home for the holidays, I was arrested for a probation violation, which I felt wasn't my fault, and a dirty test, which was.

When I was arrested I had no chance to say goodbye or to organize any of the stuff that would be left behind. Since then I have basically lost everything—my girl, the apartment, personal belongings, and all of my records of history, my history. I hated everything and everybody for what had been done to me.

Now, after two months here in this jail drug program and approximately 60 NA meetings, I have hope that I can rebuild my life successfully. It won't be easy, but it wasn't all that easy messing up my life, either. It will be one day at a time and one step at a time.

The highlight of my day is the NA meeting where H&I speakers share their experience, strength, and hope with us, as well as my fellow inmate addicts sharing their stories.

I now realize that NA is the only way to rebuild my life, stay clean, and have the opportunity to once again have a successful, fruitful, and productive life.

Coming to jail, this drug program, and NA has saved my life. I thank God each day for the blessing of recovery in my life and the ability to see the destruction I created for myself as well as others.

I pray that this same spirit will be accepted by other inmates and addicts, as well as by friends I have outside these walls. I have become a group leader, have chaired NA meetings in jail, and intend to become involved upon my release as a positive member of NA.

My only fear in leaving here is that I have lost everything and have nowhere to go. But I do have faith that my Higher Power will provide a way, especially with the help of my NA brothers. I thank God each day for the strength and hope.

BC, Florida

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is R, indeed a grateful recovering addict. I thought I would take a few minutes of my incarcerated day to express my gratitude for sending me hopes and strengths of addicts all over the world.

I, like many others, am not new at this. In fact, I've been here twice before. This 20-year sentence would prove to be the breaking point in my ongoing search to figure out what I want to do with my life.

In the county jail, I broke down willingly to find within myself or otherwise a Higher Power that would work for me. I found this power in my gut feelings. My gut feeling tells me that NA is what I need in my life to provide what's always been missing—someone, or people, who understand where I'm coming from and where I want to go.

Since being in this prison, I've attended a few meetings and have been able to speak from the heart. In the population, you see, everyone speaks their minds—minds that are warped and twisted-diseased. I'm tired of war stories and all the garbage and pain that come with an addict who doesn't want to change.

That brings me finally to thanking you at *Reaching Out*, because these days our volunteers are not showing up but *Reaching Out* is. It gives me a chance to read, to "almost listen" to those people just like me who desperately need, but mostly want, to change. I find a peace just opening the cover, knowing that I have friends inside.

I'm eternally grateful for many new things in my life today, many things I wouldn't even have if I didn't want to change. I realize I'm still not the man I could be, nor am I quite yet the man I want to be. However, with the help of NA and *Reaching Out*, I'm nowhere near the man I used to be. We do recover!

RS, Illinois

Dear *Reaching Out*,

I'm a recovering addict named M. I'm a 32-year-old woman who was on the run for almost a year. I would like to share with you how NA has changed me.

I first heard of NA at an H&I meeting held in the county jail. I was serving a six-month sentence for a crime I committed while using.

I remember walking into the room and seeing two women who did not look anything like who I was used to seeing. But as soon as they started talking, they sounded the same as me. When they started talking about serious, real-life issues, I thought that this was when they were going to tell me how to use successfully, but it just didn't happen that way.

They talked about a sponsor, going to meetings, following what other addicts had done before them, and, most of all, not using. I left that first meeting calling them the best addicts I had ever seen, but something hit me inside. I was able to identify with these women

whom I had never seen before in my life. It was as if they were inside my head.

Well, upon my release I started going to these meetings, but I went high. I just couldn't figure out why I wasn't happy like those women were. How come they talked of handling situations and I was still coming up empty-handed?

Well, after 25 days out, I wound up in treatment for 35 days. I said that it was going to be different this time, and it was.

I got a sponsor, went to meetings regularly, did step work, and, most of all, I didn't use. Then, one day I looked up and I had six months clean. I couldn't believe it. Six months clean, me? Yes!

I started going back out to the jails, sitting in the very same room that those women came to see us in, and was able to carry a clear message of recovery in Narcotics Anonymous.

I got an awesome salary job. I had sponsees and traveled throughout Michigan talking recovery. My children were just as much involved in my life as I was in theirs. This continued for 2½ years. Then I met a man—got a husband and social acceptability, and became important.

I lasted for another year and a half. I say "lasted" because I quit going to meetings and dropped my sponsor and sponsees. I thought that the life I had was set, forgetting that NA gave me a new way to live. Exactly one day after celebrating my four years, I picked up, only to go back to exactly where I was five years before.

But thank God for NA, because I got clean again and turned myself in to face charges. You see, NA has taught me to have faith in God, my Higher Power. It has also taught me that I can't run from myself, nor do I have to.

I have an awesome support system that writes to me. There are no NA meetings here, but I do have my Basic Text, *Reaching Out* (January 2002 issue), and *Behind the Walls*, which I read over and over again.

I don't know how much time I'll serve because I'm awaiting sentencing, but I'm grateful to be clean. I'm grateful to have a sponsor and a family to support me. I would like to thank those who wrote of hope so that I can draw from it each day I'm here.

If I can find hope in my circumstances thanks to NA, anyone can. We do recover. My new clean date is 28 May 2002.

MT, Michigan

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is R and I am a recovering addict. I used to frequent meetings in New Jersey. I'm writing this letter from a county jail and I want to share the hope that a person can find gratitude behind the walls.

This may sound crazy, but I wasn't arrested—I was rescued from the insane life I was living. Incarceration saved me from dying from this disease. I wasn't living, I was enslaved by a power greater than myself. The disease was in charge and dictated what to do and when to do it. It's a hated disease, yet it does not come uninvited. I chose that life over reality and peace.

It was an illusion that the red carpet was laid on the floor as though I were walking into my own palace, but I ended up in the pits of hell at its insidious best.

I have my moments in here, but for the most part I try to maintain a positive attitude. God's will for me just may be to reach out to the still-suffering addict through the penal system, and if that is what my purpose is, I'm okay with it. God uses me as a vessel to carry his message, not mine.

There will always be a special place in my heart for that addict who still suffers, such as myself. I encourage other members to get some gratitude and remain vigilant. An addict in constant pain will pick up and use—it happened to me.

A grateful addict who applies those Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions will not pick up. Keep the faith. There is hope for anyone who wants this, inside or outside.

RL, New Jersey

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is M. I am in a hospital within a state prison. I am waiting for an operation on my leg while I am serving a two-year sentence on drug-related charges.

I would like to tell you what the use of drugs has done for me. Nothing, absolutely nothing. As a matter of fact, it has put me in prison, and it has wrecked my family's life as well. But they stick by me, and I know that they really do love me; I just never knew it because I was always on drugs. However, I am working on changing all of that, with God's help, and, of course, with yours (the NA

Fellowship). I really mean that. I want nothing to do with the disease of addiction or all that goes with it.

I am an addict and I need NA to help me stay clean and be a recovering addict. Although I have been clean for almost eight months now, at times I still think of using, and that makes me hate active addiction even more.

I am in a treatment unit inside a state prison, and I don't have any NA meetings to attend because I am locked down most of the time. I sure wish I could go to meetings; I really need this thing, NA.

So, I read *Reaching Out* and it acts as a meeting for me, and I read how much love people have and what they can offer. I need some of that—for life. I know I can make it with your help. What can I do? I pray!

Someday I want to be able to help others as I feel that I've been helped. I mean that. I love working with people whenever possible. Thank you, and God bless.

MW, California

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is JC and I am an addict. I've been suffering from the disease of addiction for the past six years. I am currently 17 years old and first started using when I was eleven.

I first learned of NA when I went to my first residential treatment center at the age of 13. I participated in groups three times a week. It was then that I began to learn what a teenage life was supposed to be like.

I vowed to stay clean, so when I left treatment I went to NA and found a home group. I went for a couple of weeks, then found myself moving away from the clean life, doing things that were contrary to recovery.

I started to use again. Of course I blamed everyone and everything else, which kept the focus off me. My mom is a single mother of four, and my dad went to prison in 1994. Ever since then it has gone downhill. I ran wild and was introduced to negative surroundings.

Soon after I started using again, I was arrested and locked up. When I got out on probation exactly one week later, I overdosed. I got locked up again and started to think: Why, why, why? I had no answer.

During my stay, I checked out a Narcotics Anonymous book from the library. I once again began to realize where I was supposed to be. I went to court and asked to be put on intensive probation with mandatory NA meetings because I figured this way I would attend, then get used to a routine. It lasted about two months, then I quit attending meetings and started using.

On 7 May 2001 (seven days after my 16th birthday), I got arrested again for drug-related crimes. Now, one year, one month, and twelve days later, I sit in the Texas Youth Commission. However, I'm grateful for my arrest because now I am back in NA and have no desire to use—and yes, there are drugs here.

I have now been clean since 7 May and I owe it all to NA. NA works if you work it. It just took me a while to finally surrender to that idea. One thing I have learned for sure is that this disease does not discriminate.

From the heart,
JC, Texas

Dear *Reaching Out*,

Hi, my name is A. I just finished reading *Reaching Out*. I read a lot of interesting stories. I've heard and read many stories that have related to my own. It has helped me to realize that NA has helped me in so many ways.

I have used on and off for over 17 years. I never thought anyone had done things as horrible as I had to get my next bag. Listening to people share at meetings, I finally concluded that I wasn't the only one who did those awful things.

I have never felt more comforted and understood than I do in the rooms of Narcotics Anonymous. I'm grateful for that. I was sentenced here to complete a substance abuse program, which will hopefully be in January of 2003, or then again, it could go longer.

Being here is what keeps me clean—that and, of course, the rooms of NA. As of August, I have been here for five months.

Sincerely,
AH, Delaware

Dear *Reaching Out*,

I'm sitting here in my cell, thinking about my life. I've been reading some pamphlets sent to me from Narcotics Anonymous World Services.

In one of the pamphlets it's almost like a question: "Who is an addict?" It follows with a very simple answer: "Very simply, an addict is a man or woman whose life is controlled by drugs. We are people in the grip of a continuing and progressive illness whose ends are always the same: jails, institutions, and death."

Back in April of 1994 I died from an overdose, but was brought back to life by a good doctor and God's grace. Three years later, to the month, I was on life support for three days caused by another overdose. Once again I was saved by God's grace.

I lived on the streets, lied, cheated, and stole. I really wanted to stop, but I just didn't know how. It was then that I committed the crime that I'm now locked up for, trying to get money to use. I was locked up, then given probation, and when I left that jail I went straight to a dope house. This was in March of 1998. In June of 1998, I tried to turn myself in for violating my probation. It was the only way I knew that I could stop using, at least for a while. I was told there was no warrant for my arrest.

So there I was, dirty, homeless, hadn't eaten in a few days, dope sick, and I couldn't even get arrested. I don't believe I've ever felt so hopeless. So I did what I do for a while longer, living as best I could, until I finally got sick and tired of being sick and tired.

On 24 April 1999, I made my way into an NA meeting. It was then that I decided to give this program a try. I couldn't go to treatment because the police were looking for me, and I wasn't ready to face my past just yet.

I went to a lot of meetings, got a sponsor, and made an attempt to work this program. I stayed clean with God's grace and a very caring sponsor. We went through the steps together, until we got to Step Nine.

It was there that I drew the line. I couldn't work the Ninth Step because I would go to jail. My life had changed, and for the first time that I can remember, I was enjoying life. I didn't want to give it up. The day after I made that statement I discovered that God had other plans.

On 10 April 2002, I was arrested on an outstanding warrant. That was God's way of humbling me and helping me to make the amends that I was afraid to make on my own.

At first I wasn't real happy, to say the least. Today I am grateful to have an opportunity to carry the message of recovery in the prison where I am incarcerated. I get to do a lot of Twelfth Step work here. That keeps me out of myself and helps me to realize how very fortunate I am to be clean.

God didn't work this miracle in my life because I'm so special. He did it because I asked Him, and I was willing to do the work. Well, at least some of it.

I do know that God will help anyone who humbly asks Him and is willing to put forth the effort. Hope to see you in a meeting soon.

DS, Texas

FROM THE OUTSIDE

Editor's Note: This section is dedicated to aiding H&I subcommittees to gain a worldwide perspective on H&I activity. It reflects input received from H&I subcommittees and may address specific issues of interest to members in their H&I efforts as well as personal experiences obtained through carrying the NA message of recovery to addicts who are unable to attend regular meetings. You may also find personal experience from those members who heard the message on the inside and are now out in the community. Members and H&I subcommittees should send their input to the WSO, PO Box 9999, Van Nuys, CA 91409-9999, USA.

Dear *Reaching Out*,

Hi: I'm J and I'm an addict in recovery. For years I was just a wannabe. I would say, "I wanna be this and I wanna be that." I never really wanted to do anything but get high and forget about life, my family, etc.

I was in and out of jail for about ten years. Everyone was sick and tired of me, but I didn't care. I thought they owed me just because I was so miserable all the time.

I didn't hear anything about recovery for a long time. There weren't any people who came and shared from any twelve-step program. If they did, I didn't know it. I might not have listened anyway. It wasn't until I faced some serious time that I went to my

first meeting. I'd like to say I surrendered to the program right then and there, but that would be a lie. I was fightin' mad and willing to share that with anyone I came across.

I'm so glad I stuck around long enough to hear something at a meeting. Hell, it wasn't me wanting to stay, it was a power greater than myself (my lawyer) who told me to go. He said I might have a chance at staying out of prison if I did. After attending some meetings and then attending some while not using, I found out that I was already in a prison of my own making. I built it brick by brick every time I lied, stole, or cheated. "Prisoners of our own mind and condemned by our own guilt"—that's what it says in the Basic Text and that's where I was when I got clean.

Just for today, I am free from both kinds of prisons: mine and society's. What I try to do is to make sure I go places to share with people who are like me but may not know it yet. That means walking back into those places I didn't want to be—only now I'm not going into prison because a judge told me to. I'm going on my own free will. I don't know if I would have heard what NA has to offer while I was in jail. I never got the chance to find out. That's the main reason I got involved in H&I.

Maybe someone will hear and get a little bit of hope in a place that seems hopeless. It's a little uncomfortable sometimes to walk through the doors, but oh, what a feeling when I can leave after the meeting. I'm sorry for the men stuck in there, but grateful to be alive and clean in Narcotics Anonymous. There's no other feeling like it. Thanks for letting me share.

J

Dear *Reaching Out*,

My name is S and I'm an addict just recently released from a federal prison. I wrote to *Reaching Out* before, in 1998. Since that time there have been a lot of changes that have taken place in my life.

When I wrote the last time, I was in a state prison in North Carolina and still facing 13 years in a federal prison. As a result of doing the next right thing, I went back to court and got seven years knocked off my sentence.

All of that took place as a result of trusting God, my sponsor to whom I wrote every week, and others in the fellowship who gave me their encouragement. There were a lot of times I just wanted to give

up, but I was simply trusting the process. Like my sponsor would tell me, "As long as you are doing the right things, good things will happen." For me, that still holds true today.

Today I am still reaping the rewards from before. I have a driver's license, where in the past I hadn't had one since 1987. I'm able to hold down a good job, and more than that, my employer trusts me with his money and merchandise. You see, in my past life, I went to prison for stealing other people's money and merchandise by whatever means possible.

At times I still struggle with wanting to revert back to that self-destructive behavior, but, thank God, I'm able to recognize things today, or my sponsor will point them out to me.

Anyway, for all the addicts who are out there in a prison somewhere, or somewhere out there outside of prison, trust the process of recovery. Things will not get better overnight, but they will get better for you if you just hang on. Love you all.

SS, North Carolina

WE NEED YOUR HELP:

For the first time in well over a decade, our backlog of letters/input may not be sufficient to produce the April 2003 issue. As you may have noted in the past four or five issues the, "From the Outside" section has been sparse, to say the least. Now we face the same problem with letters, "From the Inside." Help us to help you by providing material for future issues of the newsletter.

"When at the end of the road we find that we can no longer function as a human being, either with or without drugs, we all face the same dilemma. What is there left to do? There seems to be this alternative: either go on as best we can to the bitter ends—jails, institutions, or death—or find a new way to live. In years gone by, very few addicts ever had this last choice. Those who are addicted today are more fortunate. For the first time in man's entire history, a simple way has been proving itself in the lives of many addicts. It is available to us all. This is a simple spiritual—not religious—program, known as Narcotics Anonymous."

(From chapter eight of the *Narcotics Anonymous* (Basic Text)—
"We Do Recover," page 84)

NOTE FROM THE EDITOR: If you are a recovering addict who is housed in a correctional or treatment setting, let us hear how Narcotics Anonymous has helped you in your life. Send us a letter addressed *Dear Reaching Out*. Many times the articles that we receive cannot be used because they concentrate on using and not on how NA has helped addicts to recover. Please keep this in mind when you write to us.

If you are a member of an H&I subcommittee, let others hear how you or your subcommittee have carried the NA message of recovery.

We would like to thank all of the members who have sent in articles and other written contributions to the newsletter. We all have a responsibility to the suffering addict and to ourselves as recovering addicts to do our best in carrying the Narcotics Anonymous message of recovery—to participate by sharing with others what we have been freely given.

GET INVOLVED AND HELP US CARRY OUT OUR FELLOWSHIP'S PRIMARY PURPOSE!!



H&I Learning & Awareness Days Coming Up

Note: If your area or region is holding an H&I learning or awareness day and wishes to have it listed in *Reaching Out*, please mail a flier or notice to the WSO.

Our planned publication deadlines are as follows:

<u>Issue</u>	<u>Deadline</u>
April 2003	15 January 2003
July 2003	15 April 2003
October 2003	15 July 2003
January 2004	15 October 2003
April 2004	15 January 2004
July 2004	15 April 2004



MY GRATITUDE SPEAKS WHEN I CARE AND WHEN I SHARE WITH OTHERS THE NA WAY

Reaching Out

SUBSCRIPTION ORDER FORM

Reaching Out is a quarterly, recovery-oriented newsletter made available *free of charge to incarcerated addicts* through the World Board of Narcotics Anonymous. It contains letters written by Narcotics Anonymous members who are in hospitals or institutions or are involved in H&I service. This newsletter is also available by subscription to NA members, correctional facilities, service committees, or anyone else who is interested. For the yearly price of \$31.00, the subscriber will receive 20 copies of the *Reaching Out* newsletter each quarter.

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